

## Grant Selection Process Report

<b>Legal Applicant:</b>	Maine Youth Alliance dba the Game Loft	<b>Program name:</b>	I Know ME: Raising Aspirations
<b>Recommendation:</b>	Do not fund		
<b>Reviewers:</b>	Ed Barrett, Joe Young		

<b>Grant Category:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Competition: Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Operating <input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Fixed Price <input type="checkbox"/> Ed Award Only	<b>Performance Period:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Year 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 3  <b>Start/End Date:</b> <u>[09/01/17 ] to [08/31/18 ]</u>
<b>Type:</b>			
<b>ME Priority Area:</b>	<u>[ Education ]</u>	<b>Fed Priority Area(s):</b>	<u>[ Education ]</u>

Request for New Resources		CNCS	Local
<b>New CNCS Funds:</b>	\$83,035.00	<b>Cost sharing proposed</b>	%64    %36
<b>Match Committed:</b>	\$ 48,653.00	<b>Min. Match required</b>	%30
<b>Total Grant Budget:</b>	\$131,688.00		
<b>Cost Per Member:</b>	\$41,518		

  

AmeriCorps Member Service Years: <u>2</u>					
	FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT
Slots with living allowance	2	-	-	-	-
Education Award only					

**Total prior years with CNCS funding:** [ NA ]

**Prior experience with CNCS funding:** [describe type of grant and how many 3 year grants applicant has had; any special notes about prior funding such as whether it was same or different model, another category of funding.]

### Statement of Need (from application narrative):

Waldo County Maine is a rural community with a population of 38,786 (50 people per square mile population density, U.S. Census 2000). The service area is the 11 towns served by the regional school unit, RSU 3. Aspirations of youth are low. This need will be addressed by the Aspirations Incubator Program, a pilot project supported by the Lerner Foundation, coupled with deployment of two AmeriCorps members dedicated to the project. The need in Waldo County is prevalent and severe. There is no industry in Waldo County and the majority of jobs are in education, technology, or medicine. The child poverty rate is 45% with 100% of students in RSU 3 receiving free lunch and three of the towns in the district rated as a "food desert" by USDA. Many of the students in RSU 3 come from families facing generational poverty. 21% of students are chronically absent from school. (Kids Count Data Center). Only 14% of students receiving free or reduced lunch in school earn 2 or 4 year degrees. These students with poor academic preparation struggle in post-secondary education and in employment. In Maine 42% of the population over 25-years-old has a post-secondary degree while in Waldo County only 36%. Low income students whose parents have not graduated from postsecondary educational programs face higher obstacles in their readiness for college and their ability to graduate within six years. Adults without a post-secondary education will be hampered in their subsequent employment. Students with learning or behavioral problems as identified by Individual Educational Plans (IEP's) finish College at an even lower rate - 25% of students currently served by the Game Loft at RSU 3 have an IEP.

In addition to their low income status youth from western Waldo County are geographically and socially isolated which further lowers their aspirations. In the identified population fewer than 75% have traveled outside Waldo County. In the group of identified students most have never had social or cultural opportunities outside their families and school settings. Few students take lessons leading to mastery (sports, art, drama, music) outside the school. Only 10% have access to non-family community mentors. Evidence of community need is widespread and documented.

Statistics come from the U.S. Census, Waldo County Community Action Program (report), the Kids Count Data Book, RSU 3, and the Game Loft.

In summary: Maine youth earn post-secondary degrees at a lower rate than students from other New England states and from the national average. Waldo County youth lag behind the state average. Low income youth and those with disabilities have even greater trouble entering and finishing postsecondary education. Without this educational preparedness these students will lack the credentials necessary to succeed in the 21st century.

The community will be involved in the program in the following ways: as members of the Game Loft board of directors, as community mentors for youth in the Circles of Care program, through parent involvement and volunteering, through the Game Loft partnership with Waldo County 4-H, through volunteer recruitment through the churches, with older teen youth mentors, and through volunteers at Unity College. AmeriCorps members will assist in volunteer recruitment and training and will work directly with volunteers in service delivery.

**Program Summary (from application):**

The Maine Youth Alliance dba The Game Loft proposes to have two (2) AmeriCorps members who will assist in running programs to raise aspirations for disadvantaged middle school youth in rural western Waldo County, Maine. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for creating and implementing a mentoring program for 11 low income students. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional seven volunteers who will be engaged in mentoring middle school youth. This program will concentrate on working with economically disadvantaged youth in grades 7-9 to improve educational and behavioral outcomes for low achieving middle school students and to prepare them for high school and post-secondary success with the Focus Area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$27660 will be matched with \$8298, (\$0 in public funding and \$8298 in private funding).

**Identified partners:**

RSU 3, Unity College, Waldo County 4-H, Lerner Foundation, USM (for evaluation)

## SCORING DETAIL

### I. Summary of Peer Reviewer Consensus Scores

(update annually to match CNCS changes in point distribution or organization of narrative)

CATEGORY	Qualitative Rating	Points
<b>Program Design Section (50%)</b>		<b>28.9</b>
Need (5 pts)	Strong	3.75
Intervention (8 pts)	Strong	6
Theory of Change and Logic Model (8 pts)	Satisfactory	4
Work Plan (8 pts)	Weak	2.4
Notice Priority (1 pts)	Strong	.75
Member Training (6 pts)	Satisfactory	3
Member Supervision (6 pts)	Satisfactory	3
Member Experience (5 pts)	Strong	3.75
Commitment to AmeriCorps ID (3 pts)	Strong	2.25
<b>Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%</b>		<b>15</b>
Organizational Background and Staffing (10 pts)	Strong	7.5
Compliance and Accountability (15 pts)	Satisfactory	7.5
<b>Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%</b>		<b>1.25</b>
Cost Effectiveness (20 pts)	Incomplete/Substandard	1
Budget Adequacy (5 pts)	Incomplete/Substandard	0.25
<b>Peer Review Total:</b>		<b>[45.15 ] of 100 possible</b>

#### Peer Review Recommendation:

Recommend with hesitation

### II. Summary of Task Force Consensus Rating and Final Score:

Category	Rating	Numeric Score
<b>Program Alignment &amp; Model (15 possible points)</b>	Satisfactory	7.5
<b>Past Performance (15 possible points)</b>	Weak	4.5
<b>Financial Plan (10 possible points)</b>	Incomplete/Substandard	0.5
<b>Fiscal Systems (10 possible points)</b>	Weak	3
<b>GTF Review Total:</b>		<b>[15.5 ] of 50 possible</b>

### III. Final Combined Score

<b>Total</b>	<b>[ 60.65 ] of 150 possible</b>
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#### Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Fund with no Corrections  
☐ Fund with Corrections  
☒ Do Not Fund

#### Final Recommendation of Grant Selection and Performance Task Force:

Do Not fund

**Referenced Conditions/Corrections:**

1. NA

**PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED****Section: Program Design (50 %)**

*Note: CNCS has subdivided this part. Each part has its own points so the 50 points are spread over the 9 parts. The comments indicate the part and follow the narrative outline in the RFP.*

**Comments: Need**

- Child poverty rate higher than state avg., student aspirations low; free lunch program eligibility 100%; reading, math proficiency stats; absentee rate high; stats on poor academic preparation.
- Well-cited evidence of need, good statistics for population served, strong history of working with population, strong support from Lerner Foundation for multi-year approach. Also, reaching out to other organizations, Trekkers, to help with staff training and support.
- Compelling data is provided to support need. How community members will be included is in the grant, implies that agency is the entity that will be engaging the community.

**Comments: Intervention**

- Community engagement; core model of program provided is detailed and comprehensive; specific intervention activities are fully and robustly described; applicant addressed each of the assessment criteria well; resources described by applicant appear to be more than adequate to reach described outcomes; the applicant describes a well-balanced plan using community volunteers to fully engage them in project; target populations described is clearly identified and reasonable.
- The intervention approach is shows strong potential for success, but so much of this will depend on the organization's ability to recruit and retain community volunteers and peer mentors.
- Resources such as primary worksite, 48 field trip site partners, Circle of Care volunteers are specified. Availability of these resources could be elaborated upon (is AmeriCorps going to need to recruit their involvement, or will it be pre-established?) Time spent with 11 students is 3-4 hrs. of 1 on 1 per student. This is 33-44 hrs. or 16.5-22 hrs. per AmeriCorps member. Feasible only if curriculum planning expectations are reasonable.

**Comments: Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model**

- Rationale for # of service units/children served is clear; outcomes for first and second year have been identified with measurement method described, although no rationale for degree of predicted outcome is given, i.e. why will absenteeism decrease, behavioral issues decrease, student grades increase? These outcomes were not linked specifically to any one intervention described. Applicant did provide details about intervention being evidence-based (USDHHS-4-H nationally). Applicant's AC members are clearly described as making significant contributions based on # hours involved with students, interventions. Capacity building activities are not yet deployed, it is unclear what may have been done prior to applicant submission to prepare for project implementation—there is a plan in place for internal capacity building post-award.
- The connection between capacity building to deliver service, engage volunteers is unclear. The agency is 20 years old but cites setting up offices, etc. as building capacity?
- The targets for achievement are not strong – the rationale for just 11 students is the size of the agency van and there is no explanation for engaging just 7 volunteers. It is noted that the applicant seems not to have read the instructions which directed them to omit activity performance measures and just describe service units and anticipated outcomes. The RFP instruction for selecting capacity building performance measures was not followed either.
- They cited some good stats through US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 4-H and Positive Youth, but unconvinced that the intervention would lead to the grade improvements and decreased absenteeism or decreased behavioral problems- it felt like a weak link.
- Evidence of effectiveness could have been elaborated upon. How will students be selected? Outcomes- why was "1 per quarter" chosen as the target decrease for behavioral problems/absenteeism? What makes this statistically significant/ realistic? As parents are included in the number of total people being served by this grant, where are the evaluation tactics that will be used on this pool (which represents the majority of the # of individuals being served).
- When this section is considered in the context of how school years play out, there are more questions than answers raised by the narrative.
- The AmeriCorps member tasks are described and, when the hours are added up, there isn't enough work for a full-time person (4 hours weekly with the 11 students; one 8 hour Circle of Caring per quarter; 3 hours X 6 students or 18

hours weekly in 1-to-1 meetings – presuming the members each work with half the group). There is no indication what they will be doing the rest of the time.

**Comments: Work Plan**

- Applicant's work plan describes key deliverables, and identifies necessary tasks to achieve anticipated outcomes. Narrative clearly identifies roles/responsibilities for all involved parties. The work plan presented aligns with outcomes, program implementation and key factors for fully deploying interventions, and addresses all points detailed in the assessment criteria.
- However, the work plan begins well before the grant award, covers tasks that are organizational (setting up office, getting office furniture, etc.) rather than programmatic, and has unrealistic expectations of AmeriCorps members. Example – members are selected in September, complete orientation, and expected to have full enrollment in program by the end of the month.
- I felt that some of the timing was ambitious- to hire AmeriCorps members in September, and then expect them to have identified the first cohort of students, meeting with parents, and creating a curriculum by the end of September? Unless they already have plans in place and students identified, it will be difficult to get the commitment needed from students, parents, and volunteers to lay a solid foundation for successful program in such a short period of planning time.
- Work Plan begins before the period being funded by the grant. IKM background/trainings/qualifications could have been summarized briefly in Staffing or Orientation should not have been part of the AmeriCorps term Work Plan. Work Plan for first quarter is inconsistent and likely unrealistic. Ex, by Sept 30th AmeriCorps will be hired and trained (key accomplishment 4) but during this same month, AmeriCorps will also have been involved in Key Accomplishment 5, working with cohort and parents in schools, AND will have created advertisement activities and made speeches throughout area according to Key Accomplishment 6.
- This work plan has a number of problems and is not likely to succeed as presented.
- The work plan addresses Member onboarding, service activities, and capacity building tasks. The activities and indicators of progress or completion should logically align with the outcome, program implementation, and capacity building described in the previous section. It did not.

**Comments: Funding Priority**

- Clear and concise with regard to service activity being allowable under Education. No mention of capacity building priority which is the priority for this grant.

**Comments: Member Training**

- Applicant asserts there will be high quality training, but does not provide enough detail about what that training entails so that reviewer is unable to ascertain training rises to that level. Applicant is specific about ensuring AC members will have awareness of AC requirements but does not say how that will be accomplished and reinforced as the year progresses.
- I feel that more should be done up front with training to create a solid cohort with other AmeriCorps members doing similar work, and giving them the time to orient to their service community, the different towns they will be serving, and to build solid relationships up front. The description of the initial training is inadequate. Narrative just says "intensive training followed by ongoing training." Working with this population will require an understanding of this challenges faced by this particular population, understanding rural Maine demographics and trying to have an empathy for this population in order to serve them adequately. None of these are addressed in the narrative so it is unclear whether members will be prepared to succeed in their assignments.
- Concise summary of an ample blend of community, agency, and AmeriCorps trainings. Inclusion of school-based/county-context orientation needed.

**Comments: Member Supervision**

- While the applicant describes a strong plan for ensuring that supervisors of the AC members will be adequately trained and prepared for their role as supervisors of the AC members, the response fails to address how and to what degree the AC members will receive strong guidance and support from the supervisor.
- Training described is to occur before program award and is solely for the supervisors. It is unclear how supervisor training by another nonprofit would prepare employees to support AmeriCorps members – content is not described.
- Need to understand whether site mentors (teachers, co-directors, etc.) play a role in AmeriCorps evaluation/mentoring/coaching.
- No description of supervision plan for AmeriCorps members.

**Comments: Member Experience**

- The applicant provides specific examples of employable skill sets and associated meaningful service experience. The proposal would benefit from providing more information about the frequency of opportunities for reflection and connection to the broader National Service network—there are no details demonstrating how connections to the broader network will be accomplished. Details are provided about AC member recruitment within the operational community selected.
- They did not identify how the member will feel part of a larger service network of statewide AmeriCorps members. No reference to professional opportunities for the members to be involved in local volunteer management networks, like through the United Way, or having opportunities to connect with other volunteer managers.
- Weekly log concept is interesting, would be more impactful if connected to resume building. Grant does not include broader service experiences outside of agency project. Grant does include AmeriCorps trainings/conferences and service within agency.

**Comments: Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification**

- Applicant indicates AC members will be “branded” as such within the service area and will wear clothing indicating they are AC members in public settings.
- Again, they did not reference the connection to the larger AmeriCorps service network.
- Ample examples of how AmeriCorps brand will be exhibited.

**Section: Organizational Capability (25%)****Comments: Organizational Background and Staffing**

- The applicant describes a strong history of experience with engaging volunteers and providing adequate staffing and management for programs. While it does not specifically identifying its SWOT, it does provide some details about its rapid growth and planning for transition. Applicant describes a strong management decision-making process/structure. The narrative could be enhanced by more details about the status of its planning/development activities.
- They have a solid 20 years of experience, but are experiencing growing pains with the expansion of programming funded by the Lerner Foundation grant.
- Elaboration on the co-directors, number of staff, relation of staffing specific to the IKM project, would have made this section better.

**Comments: Compliance and Accountability**

- The applicant provides information about its internal financial controls, including separation of duties, oversight, and accountability—it did not address the area of abuse of donor funds directly, although it can be inferred that controls are in place. Applicant asserts it will hold itself accountable in the event of identified risk/noncompliance, and will adhere to rules regulations and unallowable activities.
- They appear to have good checks and balances in place but describe no method for detecting waste/fraud/abuse. There is an assertion they will hold themselves accountable but no description of what response to such an incident or suspicion of one would entail.
- Compliance and financial check and re-checks are explained in detail. HOW will the agency hold itself accountable? - Not explained

**Section: Budget and Cost Effectiveness (25%)****Comments: Cost Effectiveness**

- There are personnel in the budget whose roles are not evident in the narrative.
- They are asking for more than the allowable amount from CNCS for 2 AmeriCorps members this is not cost effective.
- The cost-per-member is far beyond what is allowed and repeatedly described in the RFP.
- The applicant has described a well-developed and evidence-based series of intervention strategies that are reflected in the budget.
- There is no indication the applicant has other resources or the capacity to secure about \$50,000 if the proposal is funded at the allowable level.
- They state they are covering some expenses from funds that are not Lerner but nothing is described here or in the source of match other than the Lerner funding.

**Comments: Budget Adequacy**

- It appears the budget detail needed to determine key costs were calculated appropriately. It appears there may be a miscalculation of the MSY cost.
- They are asking for more than the allowable amount from CNCS for 2 AmeriCorps positions, so the budget is not reflective of this discrepancy.
- The budget does not follow the instructions to show how the AmeriCorps funds (\$13,830 X 2 = \$27,660) would be spent.
- As noted above, the source of funding is only the Lerner grant; the source of other agency funds to cover the items it mentions (planning, rent, etc.) in narrative are not listed; positions under personnel are not clearly tied to program.
- Did not respond to the points required.

### **Peer Review Summary Appraisal**

*1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant could be effective in this category of grant?*

- Maybe

***Why or why not? Please be specific and cite evidence from the proposal.***

#### **Comments:**

- Applicant addresses most elements of this RFP and appears to have clear objectives, good management, and a compelling need for AC members in order to implement its proposed intervention and achieve desired outcomes described.
- They have a strong history of working within these communities and with this population. They have solid relationships with the schools and Trekkers.
- Two AmeriCorps to support 11 students and their families, or 5-6 families per Corps member, is half of the typical/recommended caseload for a social worker. This should reasonably allow for AmeriCorps to still engage in other goals and service activities.
- It is curious that they did not address whether they had prior AmeriCorps experience.
- The way the proposal is written it appears the applicant did not read the overall instructions and, therefore, missed several important pieces of information.
- The ambivalence about whether it would succeed is based on the purpose of Rural AmeriCorps grants vs clarity about the applicant's performance obligations to other funders.

#### ***What elements of the proposal are unclear?***

- The elements that were included are mostly clear, although some were somewhat weakly addressed.
- The amount requested from CNCS is not aligned with the maximum allowable requirement.
- Member supervision is not addressed.
- The work plan, as provided, is not likely to succeed.
- Work Plan sets unrealistic given goals for an AmeriCorps member's first month. Redistributing responsibilities will likely be a needed during the pilot year of the project.

#### ***What else do you have to say about this proposal?***

- Should this grant process been more competitive, evaluating total impact on a region for this project compared to others might have been difficult, as this grant did not convince me that graduation rates/rate of post-secondary education of Waldo County (statistics introduced in the NEED narrative) will be significantly impacted by IKM.

#### **TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:**

#### **Program Model**

##### **Satisfactory**

- I struggled to understand the narrative and how it would impact students and their families.

- Community need is well defined, although data supporting it could have been stronger particularly re: percentage of students going on in post-secondary education. Program addresses education focus area with special emphasis on economically disadvantaged.
- Focus seems to be on both improving the situation of client students enrolled in the program and enhancing organizational capacity to continue the program through the six year Lerner funding cycle and beyond.
- The initial scope of the project appears to be somewhat limited in that only 11 students will be recruited; however, the plan appears to be to add similar cohorts in each of the following five years which aligns with the model's emphasis in beginning the program in middle school and continuing it through high school. As noted in the peer review, this may allow for member time to be devoted to other/related activities during the initial year. It also looks to recruit only 7 additional volunteers, which peer review commented on somewhat negatively; however, it appears to me that in addition to recruiting new, the program will also be training/working with existing volunteers, so may not be as problematic as noted.
- Low student aspirations are problematic throughout the state, particularly among economically disadvantaged individuals or those with special needs.
- It appears the program understands the elements of volunteer management given the number of volunteers already in place.

#### **Past Performance**

##### **Weak:**

- One grant cited in review. No details. Did not require local match. Did not mention that program previously had history of housing members.

#### **Financial Plan**

##### **Incomplete/Substandard:**

- Early in the narrative: "The CNCS investment of \$27660 will be matched with \$8298, (\$0 in public funding and \$8298 in private funding)." This does not match the program budget which shows much higher funding request. While local match is adequate, amount requested exceeds normal limit per member. Was this the intent or was it caused by confusion on the applicant's part?
- The Cost Per MSY is much higher than the maximum allowed amount

#### **Fiscal Systems**

##### **Weak:**

- Overall financial situation of agency is of concern given its negative fund balance and expenses exceeding revenues in most recent year. Note that over \$50,000 is due to employees/directors. I would need to see a financial recovery plan along with a more detailed of the reason that \$50,000 is owed and how the organization plans to address those payments. Not clear that the agency has the resources to survive based on recent history.
- I found their financial position troubling.
- Budget deficit went further up.

#### **Task Force Summary Appraisal**

*Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective?*

- No - due to budget and fiscal concerns
- Cost per member is \$41,518. Significantly higher than the maximum allowed \$13,830.
- I agree with staff assessment. I found their financial position troubling.

#### **Why or why not? Please be specific and cite evidence from the proposal.**

- Concerned about the financial strength of the program. The Cost per MSY is almost four times as high as the maximum allowed amount and the amount requested is NOT justified.

#### **What elements of the proposal are unclear?**



- Why the Cost per MSY is so high: Insufficient Justification for “above the maximum cost per MSY.”
- The narrative and how it would impact students and their families.

***What else do you have to say about this proposal?***

- Risky due to budget and financial concerns